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AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN THE

CAPITOL, IN WASHINGTON CITY,

February 16th, 1828,

AT

AN EXHIBITION OF THREE OF THE PUPILS

OF THE

PENNSYLVANIA INSTITUTION FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE DEAF AND DUMB.

BY LEWIS WELD,

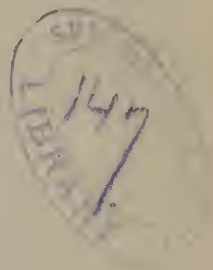
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the hands of the intelligent they are capable of application to all the subjects of thought and of communication, between man and man.

It was this discovery and the success attending the course of instruction which followed it, that gave rise to the Royal Institution of France, and in fact to those of most of the countries of Europe; several of which depend for support upon the bounty of their respective governments. Others are most liberally sustained by private charity; so that the best opportunities have been enjoyed for perfecting this most difficult system of education, and bringing it to the test of experience. About ten years since it was introduced into the United States, in its most approved form and by men singularly qualified for the undertaking. Its success here has been witnessed by thousands of our fellow citizens, and its good effects have been experienced by hundreds of their children, who must otherwise have remained but *blanks* in society.

Happily for those engaged in the cause of education, they meet nothing in the genius of our country or her institutions, unfriendly to their object. On the contrary, the diffusion of knowledge among all classes of society, is one of her distinguishing characteristics, and hence, little more is requisite than to make known the necessities of the ignorant, and the claims of the unfortunate, to ensure relief. But that we may act understandingly in the cause of the Deaf and Dumb, it becomes necessary to know the extent of the evil we are called upon to remedy, as well as those general principles in the management of institutions for them, which experience has proved the most efficacious.

In the year 1820 the number of deaf-mutes was ascertained in forty-one counties, of the state of Pennsylvania. The result was, that among the whole white population of twenty-five of these counties, the proportion of the Deaf and Dumb, was precisely one to every two thousand, and in regard to the whole population of the state, this proportion holds very nearly.

Similar enumerations have been made in other states, and in foreign countries, and the results tend to establish the same position.

Assuming it then as proved, that this is the true proportion in our country generally, we may easily ascertain not only the whole number of Deaf and Dumb persons, but those who are proper subjects for instruction. To this end I have referred to the census of 1820, as published under the direction of the government, and have ascertained the free white population of the several states and territories of the Union, and also that portion of this population between the ages of ten and twenty-six years; knowing that the proper period for educating the Deaf and Dumb, is between those ages. Indeed the best period is generally between twelve and eighteen years. The result of calculations made on these data is, that among the whole free white population of the United States in 1820, there were three thousand nine hundred and thirty-five deaf-mutes of all ages: among that portion of this population between ten and twenty-six years of age, there were probably one thousand three hundred and eighty-eight. Most of these we may suppose were at that time capable of receiving an education.

Of these, there were in the six eastern states, 824 of all ages; 296 between 10 and 26.

In the four middle states, 1327 of all ages; 471 between 10 and 26.

In the six southern states, 901 of all ages; 317 between 10 and 26.

In the eight western states, and the territories of the Union, 883 of all ages; 304 between 10 and 26.

Making a total of 3935 of all ages; 1388 between 10 and 26.

From the preceding statements as well as from others which might be made, we may form an estimate of the number of institutions necessary for the education of the Deaf and Dumb throughout the United States.

The experience of the best institutions goes to shew, that one which is well supported, is able to keep constantly under instruction from one hundred and fifty to two hundred pupils. This is important on various accounts, but principally, perhaps, from motives of economy. The expenses of qualifying and supporting teachers, procuring suitable buildings, furniture, &c. are necessarily great. But an institution fairly established, can

receive and educate a pretty large number at a rate much less in proportion than a small one, and be quite as likely or more so, to give them the best advantages. Such an institution can readily furnish mechanical and other proper employments for the poor among its pupils; and thus by giving them industrious habits, and a knowledge of some proper occupation, may prepare them for usefulness immediately upon leaving it.

It must be evident, that an institution could not exist in each state of the Union, even if one were established; for, after eight or ten years, when the annual increase only are to be taught, it could not have pupils enough to furnish employment for a teacher.

Let us suppose that six institutions were endowed, properly located and provided with instructors; and also, that the whole number of deaf-mutes which probably existed among the whites of the United States in the year 1820, namely, three thousand nine hundred and thirty-five, should in the course of *ten* successive years be offered to them. There would be about three hundred and ninety-four for them all, or about sixty-six for each, annually. If the course of instruction continued five years, the whole number of pupils in each institution, would be three hundred and thirty; but all the facts we can collect, tend to prove, that this estimate is by far too large, for deductions are to be made for disease, idiocy, accident and death; to each of which evils, this class of people are no less liable than others. Age too, at the present time, would make another deduction, though this will eventually cease to operate, because all may be received at the proper age.

On the whole it appears, that in a population of a million, after making all due allowances, about *sixteen* only, will *annually* become suitable subjects for instruction. Taking the whole population of the United States at *twelve millions*, we find included six thousand deaf-mutes, giving by previous estimates an annual number of *two hundred* for instruction. These might be divided among the six institutions supposed.

The New England states all unite in patronizing one institution; and it is capable of demonstration, that it is much cheaper for the state of Maine, for example, to send her pupils to Con-

necticut for education, than to establish a school of her own. Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont, have for some years made appropriations for the education of their indigent deaf-mutes at the Asylum in Connecticut. This example, I am persuaded, will be followed by the other sections of the Union, unless the multiplying of institutions prevent, before information is diffused and the subject is properly understood. If one institution is sufficient for the New England states at this time, when there are, so to speak, two or three generations to be educated, it will surely remain so when the annual increase only is to be taught. The same remark may be made of the other divisions of the country.

We ought in this connexion to recollect, that the population of our country is rapidly increasing, and hence, the proportion of deaf-mutes continuing the same, we may reasonably suppose, that six institutions would be supplied with a respectable number of pupils, notwithstanding the numerous necessary deductions to which we have alluded.

There are many reasons why it seems proper, that aid for the support of this object should be asked of the general government. Public institutions having from necessity, if prosperous, to derive their pupils from a considerably extent of country, including several states, cannot expect to be permanently endowed by any individual state. If they are not prosperous, in other words, if they cannot have a pretty large number of pupils, they obviously will not long exist. Another reason is, that a great majority of these people are in indigent circumstances. If educated at all, the expense to their friends, must therefore be small.

But let me appeal to parents, and ask whether those little ones, the objects of their fondest hopes and most anxious cares, are not constantly liable to this great misfortune? Can that darling child, who already perhaps gives promise of future distinction, become a poor helpless mute? and that too without the permanent loss of either bodily or mental vigour? This may be the case with him; it often has been with others. At least one half of the Deaf and Dumb who come to instruction, once possessed perfectly the sense of hearing, but losing this,

they of course lost the faculty of speech. Has not every parent then, indeed every good citizen, a deep interest in this subject? Can such an one leave his unfortunate relative, or neighbour, without the means of relief, if those means are within his power? Can he consent to see this individual a mere human animal, without a knowledge of his own nature, or the cause, or reasons of his existence? Will he suffer him to live surrounded by a world of mystery, about which he cannot even intelligibly inquire, exposed from a strange perversity in human nature to be the sport of the mischievous, and the dupe of the wicked, and as he advances to maturity, excluded from participation in the enjoyments of others, become morose, melancholy and burdensome to himself and his friends? Shall he remain in this degraded condition, when a few years of education will, with the blessing of God, give him the delights of social intercourse, the means of happiness and usefulness which others enjoy, and above all the knowledge of his God, his Saviour, the great end of his being, and the consolations of the Christian Faith? In the long catalogue of human misfortunes, what one can be named, which so truly enchains the mind and debars it the acquisition of knowledge, as the loss of hearing and its necessary consequences? In idiocy, the mind can hardly be said to exist, and in lunacy, it is destroyed; but in the case of the deaf-mute, it exists in a prison-house, and, however active in its unaided efforts for freedom, it must there remain, anxious, restless, inquiring; infantile, though mature in age, and solitary, though formed for society. Education, however, when brought to such a mind, dispels its darkness and removes its chains. Individuals now before you are examples of its efficacy, though their course of instruction is yet incomplete.

But should any one still doubt the practicability of accomplishing all for which we contend, let him visit a well regulated institution for the Deaf and Dumb, and examine for himself. He will there see an interesting assemblage of these children of misfortune, possessing all the variety of dispositions, tastes and talents which nature bestows upon his more fortunate fellow-beings, and in all the different stages of knowledge from that of an infant to that of the educated man.

He will see one perhaps just brought from the obscurity of his home. With a vacant countenance and a wandering eye, he gazes upon the new scene around him, and, after a moment of excitement, either sinks into his wonted apathy, or seems to tire with the sight of so many new and mysterious objects. Let the stranger call again, after a few weeks, and he will see this wild boy greatly changed: even the features of his face seem altered, and his whole manner is improved. He has learned that there are many others like himself, that they are happy, that, though silent like him, they can converse with facility, that they can use books, and not only form, but understand those complicated characters they contain. His curiosity is awakened; his interest is deeply excited, for he has himself met with some success, he has acquired many new ideas, and finds himself improving daily in his own language of signs and in the elements of written language. Let two or three years elapse, and the stranger will then see an ardent, active youth, (such an one is before you,) capable of expressing his thoughts in an intelligible manner, taking an interest in all around him, and surmounting one obstacle after another in the pursuit of information. Let two or three years more be added to his course, and he becomes possessed of knowledge, which will qualify him to act as a useful member of society. He will be in a good degree master of the ordinary branches of a common education, and let his advantages for improvement still continue, and there can be no limit assigned to his advancement which does not bound our own. Let the Christian mark the various steps of his progress, and he will see him at one time in absolute ignorance of all religion; having no conception of a Creator, none of his own soul, no knowledge of a future state of existence, and none of any being superior to man.

Again he will see him contemplating, with profound reverence, the character of his God and of his Saviour; receiving in simplicity the instructions of Revelation; penitent perhaps in view of his sins, and again with faith and hope and love, rejoicing in the promises of the gospel, and anticipating the blessedness of Heaven. He will see him exhibiting gratitude to his benefactors, compassion for his fellow sufferers, and for

others in misfortune; conscientious in the discharge of duty, displaying in fact with no less uniformity than others, the virtues and graces of the Christian character.

The philosopher may find in this humble individual, much to exercise his best powers of investigation. The human mind, under these circumstances, may well be supposed to exhibit phenomena, not to be found under any other. The first thing to be ascertained is its actual state before instruction. This is shortly told. It is that of almost blank ignorance, except in regard to its own experience, or to the limited number of objects which have been subjected to its observation. The uneducated deaf-mute thinks indeed, and it is a curious but well established fact that he thinks *by signs*. He has passions and may be pleased or grieved, delighted or enraged. The degree of control he has over his passions, depends very much upon his situation in life. He is a creature of imitation and avoids those things and actions he has seen others avoid, and indulges as others around him do.

The next subject of philosophical inquiry, is the means of amelioration. Here a vast field opens at once, as vast and various as the powers and capacities of the mind; for all these are to be cultivated: presenting also the entire subject of written language. It would be found indeed, that such a mind might be stored with ideas, in fact that such a person might be educated by the mere language of signs, but to restore him to society, to give him certain means of intercourse with others, he must write and read the language of the nation to which he belongs. Here is the great difficulty with which both his teacher and himself must contend; for the question at once presents itself, how is it possible to give the knowledge and use of a spoken language to a person deprived of hearing, any more than to give the knowledge of colours to those destitute of sight? Most languages are exceedingly artificial in their structure, and are so stored with idioms, figurative phrases and other peculiarities, as to be very difficult of acquisition to intelligent foreigners. These difficulties are increased beyond all comparison to the Deaf and Dumb, but may be surmounted by processes entirely philosophical, ingenious and interesting to all who are fond of

abstruse investigation. But the description of even a few of them would tire the patience of any assembly. I therefore hasten to give you not the description, but an exhibition of some of the actual processes in deaf-mute instruction, and while I am grateful for your kind attention to myself, I would ask the same for my pupils, and for the cause of the Deaf and Dumb. Their appeal, though silent, will not be unavailing; for it is to be made to Parents, to Christians, to Philosophers, to Legislators, to the Fathers and Rulers of our Common Country.

